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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR F, SCA/FO, SCA/RA, AND SCA/A
PASS AID/A JKUNDER, ANE MWARD
PASS OPIC AND TDA
CENTCOM FOR CG CSTC-A
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, BCAMP
TREASURY PASS TO LMCDONALD, ABAUKOL, AND JCIORCIARI
OSD FOR BREZINZSKI
COMMERCE FOR DEES

SIPDIS

E.O.12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [ETRD](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: FIRST AGFAIR IN AFGHANISTAN

SUMMARY

11. (U) AgFair 2007, also called the Afghan Agricultural Trade Fair, was the first international agricultural trade show of its kind in post-war Afghanistan and attracted between 45 and 60 thousand people over two days (April 22-23). The fair catalyzed much needed investment in the agriculture sector, facilitated trade, and introduced new agricultural technologies for sale to Afghanistan. The AgFair received sustained positive local press coverage and was attended by Mr. David Murdock, CEO and owner of Dole Foods Company, and high-level Government of Afghanistan officials. As the first large-scale event of this nature to be held in 30 years, AgFair provided a much-needed morale boost to the Afghan public and the private sector. END SUMMARY.

AGFAIR EVENT

12. (U) AgFair was jointly planned and managed by USAID, the Government of Afghanistan's (GOA's) Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), and the Afghan International Chamber of Commerce (AICC). Over 200 booths were rented to exhibitors and agricultural businesses on the 46,000 square meter site which was constructed to international standards in only 72 days. The physical structures consisted of 950 square meter chicken houses converted into display areas, a central stage area for performances, tents erected for food and beverage providers, equipment showcase space, and a 314 meter circumference, roofed concrete pad for the majority of the agriculture display booths. On a 140-acre plot of land adjacent to the AgFair new technologies including laser leveling of land for increased water efficiency; drip irrigation; use of plastic mulch techniques for high-value horticulture; and improved, appropriate-technology raisin drying equipment, were demonstrated.

AGFAIR PARTICIPANT REACTIONS

13. (U) International and Afghan firms participated in AgFair. Private commercial sponsors included Afghan Wireless Communications Company, Kabul Bank, Coca-Cola, Crystal Water, Alokozay Tea, Serena Hotel, the Intercontinental Hotel, and Tolo/Lemar. Businesses reported brisk sales to AgFair visitors, as summed up by Mark Henning of JDA, a US-based company selling two-wheel tractors for Afghan farms. Henning said, "We sold every piece of equipment we brought to AgFair and we made connections for additional work in Helmand and Mazar." Foreign diplomats also attended - the Dutch Charge expressed amazement at the scale and scope of the enterprise.

14. (U) Afghan farmers also expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in AgFair. Simple farming methods and inexpensive innovations that increase farm gate prices were demonstrated alongside more advanced technologies. "It is as if a blind man enters and gets his sight. AgFair gives us information about new agricultural practices", commented Obaidullah, a farmer from Qarabagh. Nasruddin, a farmer who lost most of his grapevines during the war and is now re-planting them, said, "We have Farmers' Festivals in villages but AgFair is nothing like them. It is huge. It is well organized. It is educational." Afghan farming associations, in addition to individual farmers, attended the fair. Haji Stana Gul, from the Eastern Region Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Wholesalers Association, stood proudly in front of his AgFair stand and stated, "I am happy to be here because this is how we can improve our business."

COMMENT

15. (U) AgFair 2007 had a great impact upon national consciousness

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beyond the simple economic impetus it provided to the agriculture sector. An event of this scale and scope had not been attempted in Afghanistan for over 30 years, and it was completed without any security incidents. In addition to creating a marketplace for agricultural buyers and sellers to transact business, the AgFair visually demonstrated, through media coverage, the progress that the country has made towards the normal, comparatively prosperous life that once existed before the war. Ordinary Afghan farmers and Government of Afghanistan ministries viewed the success of the AgFair as proof that the overall situation in the country is improving. AgFair will be expanded to other areas of Afghanistan and repeated in the fall. END COMMENT.

WOOD